



Tech Sgt. Justin D. Pyle

For the second year in a row, U.S. Army, Europe's influenza vaccination effort leads the Army in ensuring that service members and their families are protected against the disease.

USAREUR flu vaccine effort rated Army's best

Europe Army Regional
Medical Command
Public Affairs Office

For the second year in a row, U.S. Army, Europe, leads the Army in ensuring that Soldiers and their families are protected against influenza.

Only ten active-duty Soldiers have been diagnosed with influenza in USAREUR during this flu season.

Senior leaders credit this low number of cases to a comprehensive vaccination campaign plan and commanders' emphasis on the importance of medical readiness for a protected community.

Protection is priority

"Protecting our expeditionary Soldiers, their families and all of our other beneficiaries is my top priority," said Brig. Gen. Elder Granger, commander of the Europe Regional Medical Command and USAREUR's command surgeon.

With a 93-percent immunization rate so far, USAREUR has exceeded the Army surgeon general's goal of vaccinating 90 percent of active-duty Soldiers. The command again has the highest rate of immunized Soldiers of all major commands in the Army.

Influenza vaccinations are continuing among service members and are being recorded in the Army's Medical Protection System, a web-based tracking program that records medical readiness data and allows commanders to view the medical readiness of units or individuals from their desktop computers.

"The leadership of USAREUR clearly recognizes the importance of insuring that each expeditionary Soldier is medically ready to complete 'Any Mission, Anywhere,'" said Col. Allen Kraft, director of force health protection for ERM and USAREUR.

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Brig. Gen. Elder Granger
Europe Army Regional
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"We can be justifiably proud of our successful efforts to stop this disease," said Col. Loren Erickson, commander, U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, Europe. "Instead of being in bed sick, our people were able to enjoy their families through the holiday season."

Vaccine still necessary

Erickson pointed out that the flu season in Europe routinely runs from December through April – peaking in January – and that individuals not yet immunized would still benefit from a visit to their local medical treatment facility for the shot.

"Though the number of cases being reported in the States and in Europe is starting to drop off, we still have three more months of flu season ahead," Erickson said.

The influenza vaccine is still available in Europe free of charge for all military health care beneficiaries, including active-duty service members, retirees, Defense Department personnel and family members, he said.

"This year we are also making the vaccine available to host nation employees who work for the U.S. military," Erickson added.

For more information about the flu vaccine in Stuttgart call 430-8610/civ. 0711-680-8610.

Stuttgart group focuses on suicide prevention

Times of deployment, high operations tempo stressful for service members, families

By Hugh C. McBride

Soldiers stationed in Germany have what many call a "dream assignment." They also have the second-highest suicide rate in the Army.

Hoping to combat this disturbing statistic, a Stuttgart group is implementing an Armywide program to train service members and civilians in the science of suicide prevention.

Offering an 'ASIST'

Organized under the Stuttgart Wellness Center's umbrella of community health programs, the Stuttgart Suicide Prevention Working Group will offer the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training program to community members at regular intervals throughout the year.

"We may not prevent every suicide [in the area], but we can minimize the risk," said Michelle Saylor, 6th Area Support Group health promotion coordinator.

ASIST, Saylor said, is designed to equip members of units and organizations to serve as "first-responders for suicide prevention."

First aid for suicide

Much like emergency medical technicians are trained to assess and stabilize victims of physical trauma, ASIST students will learn to do the following:

- Identify and evaluate suicide signs and risk factors.
- Provide immediate "first-aid" to suicidal individuals.
- Link suicidal individuals with appropriate area resources.

Targeted training

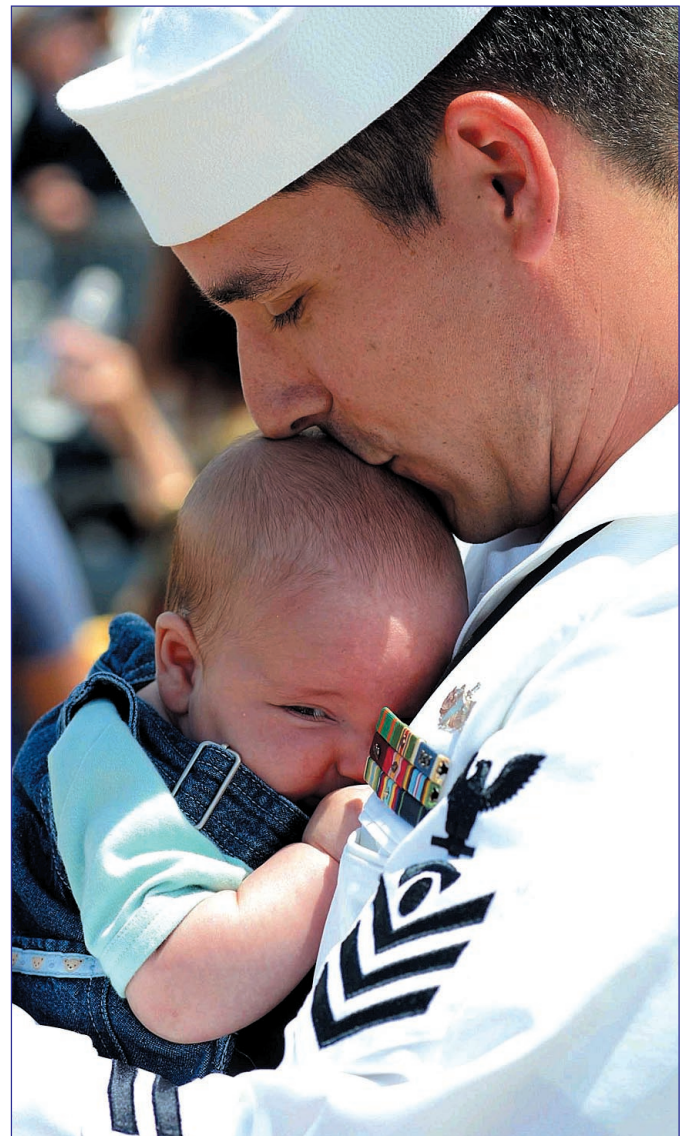
The Army's intention is to provide this training for a minimum of one person in every battalion – as well as for every chaplain and behavioral health provider and their assistants, Saylor said.

The program may also be expanded to drill sergeants, instructors, noncommissioned officers and company-grade officers.

Stuttgart's first ASIST class will be conducted March 9 and 10 in the Wellness Center conference room on Patch Barracks. The course will be taught by James Harris of the Stuttgart Red Cross and Robyn Cryer of Stuttgart's Army Community Services.

In addition to being used by the U.S. Army and Air Force, ASIST is also offered by the Canadian armed forces and many U.S. and Canadian civilian organizations.

For details call 430-4073/civ. 0711-680-4073 or e-mail saylorm@6asg.army.mil.



Photographer's Mate 1st Class William R. Goodwin

Interior Communications Electrician 1st Class Joseph A. Lazzaretti meets his two month-old son for the first time after a six-month deployment aboard the USS Crommelin. A Stuttgart-area suicide prevention group is working to combat potential effects of deployment-related stress among area service members and families.

Official says suicide is concern, not epidemic

By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

Service members in Iraq are not committing suicide in record numbers, a senior DoD military medical officer said.

"Are Soldiers killing themselves in increased numbers due to deployment? No," said Col. Thomas J. Burke, program director for mental health policy for the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

Although 19 confirmed Soldier suicides have occurred during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Burke said the Army's suicide rate "is well within the range of variation" when compared to the suicide rates for the Army over the last decade.

In fact, overall military suicide rates have remained stable for over a decade, Burke said. Press reports alleging that the numbers of military suicides occurring during the war against terrorism are outside the expected range based on historic norms are false, he said.

The good news, Burke said, is that "there is no epidemic of suicides in Iraq." The bad news, he said, is military suicide rates "are not zero, but we never stop trying to bring them down."